

American Foreign Policy Moves From Isolation To World Leadership

I. Goals of American Foreign Policy

1. General Statement: The purpose of American foreign policy is to protect and preserve the *national interest*. What specifically constitutes the national interest?
2. Specific Goals
 - a. Political: To assure the survival of the United States as a free and independent nation; defend its territories and people; protect American citizens in foreign countries, further democratic ideals throughout the world and view favorably any nation sharing our democratic outlook; disapprove of and, depending upon the circumstances, oppose any nation maligning democracy and advocating a conflicting governmental system such as military dictatorship, fascism, and communism.
 - b. Military: To maintain a strong military establishment; secure strategic military bases outside the United States; join in agreements and alliances for mutual protection, preferably with nations sharing our democratic philosophy; prevent any potentially hostile power from gaining military bases that could menace the United States; and, with the danger of nuclear conflict existing today, prevent misunderstandings and resolve issues peacefully so as to avoid an all-out nuclear war.
 - c. Economic: To assist American farmers and manufacturers who *export* products to foreign markets; assist American corporations that *import* raw materials, farm produce, and some

manufactured goods from foreign nations; protect American workers and businesses against competition of under priced foreign-made goods produced by cheap labor; protect *foreign investments* of American individuals and corporations against harassment and *nationalization* (seizure) of their properties without payment of fair compensation by foreign governments; secure repayment of governmental and private loans made to foreign nations.

3. Priorities in Foreign Policy Goals: the United States has pursued foreign policies that apparently are in conflict-but not really so. In each case, American leaders have had to decide among several foreign policy goals by setting priorities-, that is, which goal is first and which goal is last in importance.

Although one American goal has been to further foreign trade, since 1960 the United States has maintained an embargo on trade with Cuba-an apparent conflict. Not so, for American leaders have given priority to another goal: to stop the spread of Communism in the Western Hemisphere. By denying Cuba access to American markets to sell its raw materials and access to American industry to purchase machinery and replacement parts, American leaders have expected to weaken Cuba economically, thereby lessening its ability to influence other Latin American nations toward communism. The United States thus sacrificed the less important goal, trade, and opted for the more important one, stopping the spread of Communist influence.

Although another American foreign policy goal has been to further democracy, the United States has given

substantial economic aid to Latin American military dictatorships-an apparent conflict. Not so, for American leaders have given priority to another foreign policy goal: to further hemispheric unity for mutual protection. American leaders further realize that we could not overthrow the military dictatorships and reshape the political life of these Latin American countries without intervening in their internal affairs-a course of action incompatible with American democracy.

II. American Foreign Policy: Highlights to The Post-Civil War Era

1. Policy of Isolation: George Washington, in his *Farewell Address* (1796), urged the young republic to further foreign trade but avoid permanent alliances with foreign nations. Evolving into a policy of isolation and endorsed by subsequent American leaders, Washington's advice guided American foreign policy for over 100 years. It did not prevent the War of 1812, which involved the United States in the Napoleonic Wars. But, thereafter, it enabled the American people to concentrate upon domestic issues and upon foreign affairs affecting the Western Hemisphere-especially the independence of Latin America and our expansion westward to the Pacific.
2. Monroe Doctrine: James Monroe, in his message to Congress in 1823, stated that a) the Western Hemisphere was no longer open to European colonization, b) the United States would not interfere in the internal affairs of European nations, and c) any attempt by a European power to intervene in the Americas would be regarded as "dangerous to our peace and safety."

The American people approved the Monroe Doctrine as a logical extension of our policy of isolation, since it attempted to isolate the entire Western Hemisphere from European affairs. Latin Americans, who had just won their independence, welcomed the Monroe Doctrine as an offer of assistance against would-be European aggressors. The first real application of the Monroe Doctrine took place just after the Civil War when the United States persuaded France to withdraw its troops from Mexico-an event called the Maximilian Affair.

3. “Manifest Destiny:” Many Americans in the early 19th century believed that the United States had a *manifest destiny* to expand to the Pacific coast. James K. Polk, in his Presidential campaign in 1844, demanded the “reannexation of Texas” and the “reoccupation of Oregon.” Just before Polk took office, Congress approved the annexation of Texas. Thereafter, Polk led the United States in a war with Mexico and secured the Mexican Cession territory, including California. He compromised with Britain and agreed to divide the Oregon Country at the 49th parallel. Polk’s expansion enabled the United States to reach the pacific coast.

III. THE UNITED STATES UNDERTAKES A POLICY OF IMPERIALISM

Reasons for America’s turn to Imperialism

- I. Reasons for America’s Turn to Imperialism
following the Civil War, and especially in the 1800s, the United States began to extend its control over “backward” or weaker areas in the Caribbean, Central America, South America, and the Pacific.

- Industrial Revolution

- Need for additional sources of raw materials
- Additional markets
- Desire to invest surplus capital
- Close of the frontier
- European Imperialism
 - Suez Canal & Egypt
 - Africa
 - England, France, Germany, Portugal, etc.
 - Indo-China
 - China
 - Congo
- American Nationalism
 - Expansionists
 - Captain Alfred T. Mahan – *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*

II. First Colonial Acquisitions

- Alaska (1867)
 - In gratitude of Russia's support of the Union during Civil War
 - Desire to reduce foreign presence in North America (Monroe Doctrine)
 - Incorporated Territory in 1912
- Samoan Islands and Midway
 - Served as supply harbors and coaling stations
 - Pago Pago (1872)
 - Several Islands (1899)
 - Annex Midway

Hawaii

- Acquisition (1898). Hawaii, a group of islands in the Central Pacific, 2400 miles off the California coast,
 - 1) served American merchant ships as a supply and refueling station,
 - 2) drew American missionaries, who converted the natives to Christianity, and
 - 3) attracted American investors into Hawaiian sugar plantations. Most Hawaiian sugar was sold in the United States.

In 1893 revolutionists, mainly American settlers, overthrew the anti-American native Queen Liliuokalani. The revolutionists established a temporary republic and asked for annexation by the United States. Annexation was delayed by the opposition of President Cleveland, who believed that most native Hawaiians preferred independence. In 1898, however, with McKinley in the White House, the United States annexed Hawaii.

- Statehood (1959). Our fiftieth state, Hawaii ranks 47th in area but 39th in population, with about one million inhabitants. One-fourth is white, one-fourth is of Japanese ancestry, and the rest are of Hawaiian, Filipino, and other extractions.
- Importance: Hawaii 1) produces sugar and pineapples, 2) attracts many tourists, and 3) contains the major American military installations in the Central Pacific, including the naval base of Pearl Harbor.

III. SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR (1898)

1. Cuban Background of the War

- a. Early American Interest: Americans had long been interested in the Spanish colony of Cuba. They recognized Cuba's strategic location in the Caribbean Sea. Located at the entrance to the Gulf of Mexico, the island is within 90 miles of the Florida coast. Americans feared for our security If Cuba passed from Spanish into stronger European hands.

Before the Civil War, Southerners wanted to annex Cuba as another pro-slave state. In 1854 three American diplomats declared that, if the United States could not purchase Cuba, it would be justified in seizing Cuba by force—a declaration known as the *Ostend Manifesto*. Although repudiated by the United States government, the Ostend Manifesto reflected considerable American sentiment. After the Civil War, American interest in Cuba temporarily subsided.

- b. Despotism Spanish Rule: Spain denied the Cubans civil liberties and political rights, levied heavy taxes, restricted foreign trade, and ruthlessly suppressed several rebellions. In 1895, as a depression hit the island, Spain faced another Cuban revolt for independence.

2. Causes of the Spanish-American War

- a. Humanitarianism: Americans sympathized with the desire of the Cuban people for independence. Americans were outraged when Spain's General Valeriano Weyler placed Cuban civilians in concentration camps to prevent them from aiding the revolution. Some 200,000 concentration camp inmates, mainly women and children, died of hunger and disease.
- b. Economic Interests: American merchants traded with Cuba to the amount of \$100 million per year. American investors had placed \$50 million in Cuban sugar and tobacco plantations. Our trade and investments suffered from unsettled conditions.
- c. "Yellow" Journalism: the "yellow" press – especially William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* – sought to increase newspaper circulation by sensational treatment of news from Cuba. Journalists exaggerated stories of Spanish atrocities and falsified news pictures while playing down atrocities by the Cuban revolutionaries. The yellow press also gave sensational treatment to the *De Lome Letter*. Written by the Spanish minister in Washington to a friend in Cuba and stolen from the

Havana post office, this private letter belittled President McKinley as a weak, incompetent politician. By its treatment of such news stories, the yellow press enraged the American people against Spain.

- d. Sinking of the Maine: In 1898, the American battleship *Maine*, visiting in Havana, Cuba, was blown up with loss of 260 American lives. The cause of the explosion remains unknown, but the American people blamed Spain. They were goaded by the yellow press; by jingoists who boasted of the nation's strength; and by imperialist, who wanted an overseas empire.

3. Outbreak of War

President McKinley had sought to avert war and urged Americans to remain calm regarding Cuba. Now, with the sinking of the Maine, McKinley demanded that Spain, proclaim an armistice, end the concentration camps, and negotiate with the rebels. Although Spain's reply was conciliatory, McKinley finally yielded to American public sentiment for war. At his request, Congress approved the use of American armed forces in Cuba. Congress also recognized the independence of Cuba and declared that the United States would not annex Cuba but would leave "control of the island to its people"-a self-denying declaration known as the Teller Resolution.

4. Conduct of the War

With "Remember the Maine!" as their battle cry, American forces swept quickly and easily to victory. In the Pacific, Commodore *George Dewey* led an American naval force to destroy the Spanish fleet at Manila, the capital of the Philippines, and an American army took possession of the city. In the Caribbean, American naval units destroyed the Spanish fleet at Santiago, Cuba. Meanwhile, American forces captured this city after a battle famed for the dash up San Juan Hill by Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders. In this "splendid little war," so called by the American diplomat John Hay, more American soldiers died from tropical diseases, especially yellow fever, than from Spanish bullets.

5. Treaty of Paris (1898)

Thoroughly beaten, Spain agreed to the following:

- a) Cuba was freed of Spanish control
- b) Puerto Rico, in the Caribbean, and Guam, in the Pacific, were ceded to the United States
- c) The Philippine Islands, in the Pacific, were sold to the United States for \$20 million

6. Significance

The United States emerged from the Spanish-American War as a world power with colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Anti-imperialist were alarmed. In the Presidential election of 1900, Democrat William Jennings Bryan, warned that imperialism abroad would lead to despotism at home. Disregarding this warning, the people reelected William McKinley, who had campaigned on the issue of the “full dinner pail,” but who represented imperialism.

IV. AMERICAN RELATIONS WITH CUBA

1. Temporary American Occupation: After the Spanish-American War, the United States temporarily took charge of Cuba, establishing schools, building roads, providing sanitation, and wiping out yellow fever. Americans also assisted the Cubans in drawing up a democratic constitution. In 1902, in keeping with the Teller Resolution, American forces withdrew from the island.
2. American Protectorate Over Cuba: The Platt Amendment: Under strong American pressure, the Cubans included in their constitution the *Platt Amendment*. It provided that Cuba would:
 - a) not sign any foreign treaty that threatened its independence,
 - b) allow the United States to intervene in Cuba to preserve Cuban independence and to protect life, liberty, and property,
 - c) grant the United States naval bases. Under the last provision, Cuba leased to the United States the naval base of *Guantanamo Bay*.

The Cubans lacked political experience. For years their governments alternated between weak, inefficient regimes and tyrannical military dictatorships. The island abounded with corruption, fraud, violence, and revolt.

Using the Platt Amendment, the United States intervened four times in Cuba to restore order and safeguard American lives and investments. Our interventions aroused resentment among Cuban nationalists. In 1933, however, although Cuba was in the midst of another revolt, President F. D.R. did not intervene. Instead, in 1934, as part of his Good Neighbor Policy, he abrogated (abolished) the Platt Amendment. With Cuban consent, the United States retained the naval base at Guantanamo Bay.

3. Economic Ties: Although the Platt Amendment was ended, the United States continued to dominate the Cuban economy. Americans had over \$1 billion invested in Cuban public utilities, railroads, iron and nickel mines, and sugar and tobacco plantations. The United States provided the chief market for Cuban agricultural and mineral exports, and was the chief source of Cuban imports of manufactured goods. American tourists flocked to Cuban vacation resorts.

The Cuban economy provided the people with no more than a very low living standard. Few farmers owned their own land, and farm workers received low wages. Because Cuba was largely dependent upon the sugar crop, the entire economy frequently suffered from world competition and low prices.

4. Hostility (Since 1959): *Fidel Castro*, leading Cuban rebels, overthrew the dictatorship of *Fulgencio Batista* and seized power. As Castro aligned himself with the Communist world, relations between Cuba and the United States deteriorated.

V. PUERTO RICO: AN AMERICAN SHOWCASE

1. Political evolution: From Colony to Commonwealth
 - a. Foraker Act (1900): Congress provided that the President of the United States appoint the island's

governor and the upper house of its legislature but that the Puerto Ricans elect the lower house.

- b. Jones Act (1917): Congress granted the Puerto Ricans American citizenship and the right to elect both houses of the Puerto Rican legislature.
- c. Elected Governor (1948): Congress passed a law to permit the Puerto Ricans their own governor. They chose, as their first elected governor, *Luis Munoz Marin*. Elected for four consecutive terms until he retired in 1965, Munoz Marin helped shape modern Puerto Rico. He furthered economic progress through Operation Bootstrap and Achieved commonwealth status.
- d. Commonwealth Status (Since 1952): Congress empowered the Puerto Ricans to draw up their own constitution. Under Munoz Marin's leadership, the islanders overwhelmingly chose to become freely associated with the United States as a self-governing *commonwealth*. 1) Puerto Ricans elect their own legislators and governor, who deal with local matters. 2) Puerto Ricans are American citizens. However, as long as they reside in Puerto Rico, they do not vote in Presidential elections and do not elect members of Congress. They do, however, send a resident commissioner to Washington with power to speak, but not to vote, in the House of Representatives. 3) Puerto Ricans are subject to most federal laws. They serve in the American armed forces, and their products enter the mainland free of tariff duties. However, individuals and corporations on the island are exempt from federal income taxes.
- e. Political Developments: Until recently, a majority of Puerto Rican voters approved the commonwealth status; very few desired independence. But a large minority favored statehood, which would mean voting in federal elections-and also paying federal income taxes. In the 1976 elections, Puerto Ricans narrowly elected as governor *Carlos Romero Barcelo*, an advocate of statehood. This surprising result, although probably reflecting economic discontent, spurred

interest in statehood.

In 1979 President Carter, citing “humane considerations,” freed from American prisons four Puerto Rican independence nationalists—one who in 1950 had attempted to assassinate President Truman and three who in 1954 had sprayed gunfire into the House of Representatives and wounded five members of Congress. Their unconditional release was opposed by Puerto Rico’s governor as menacing public safety and encouraging terrorism. The best-known terrorist group demanding Puerto Rican independence calls itself the *Armed Forces national Liberation* (FALN). Forces favoring statehood lost Puerto Rico’s governorship in 1984 to *Rafael Hernandez Colon*, who favors a continuation of commonwealth status. The parties favoring statehood and commonwealth are relatively equal in strength. A much smaller third party favors Puerto Rican independence.

2. Economic Developments

- a. Problem of Poverty: Despite fertile soil, favorable climate, and good crops of sugar and tobacco, the Puerto Ricans subsisted for a long time at minimal living standards. 1) The island lacks sufficient area to support its rapidly growing population in agriculture. In contrast to a population density of 67 inhabitants per square mile for the United States, Puerto Rico now has a population density of 955. 2) Most Puerto Rican land was held by American corporations. Eighty percent of the islanders were landless. 3) The island’s economy depended upon sugar. A drop in world sugar prices meant depression.
- b. Operation Bootstrap: Effects to Improve Conditions: In the early 1940s, Puerto Rico initiated a program to improve its economy. Since Puerto Rico was trying “to lift itself by its own bootstraps,” the project became known as *Operation Bootstrap*. 1) *Limits on Landholdings*. Puerto Rico began enforcing a law, passed in 1900, limiting corporate land ownership to 500 acres. The government bought up the excess

holdings and distributed the land to agricultural cooperatives and individual farmers. 2) *Tourism*. The Puerto Rican government encouraged the building of hotels and developed the island as a resort area. Beaches, gambling casinos, the *Pablo Casals Music Festival*, and touches of Spanish culture all attracted American vacationers. 3) *Social Welfare Projects*. The Puerto Rican government paved roads, built hydroelectric plants, provided public health facilities, constructed low-income housing projects, and substantially increased educational expenditures. Instruction is in Spanish; the chief second language studied is English. Literacy has risen to about 95 percent. 4) *Industrialization*. "Operation Bootstrap" especially emphasized attracting American capital and industry. The Puerto Rican government offered new factories, easy credit, and vocational training of workers. Most important, corporations in Puerto Rico are exempt from federal income taxes. Over 1000 new enterprises, manufacturing textiles, electrical equipment, plastics, chemicals, and many other products, were set up on the island and provided many jobs.

- c. Results: Today, Puerto Rico's income from manufacturing exceeds that from agriculture. The people's standard of living has risen substantially; it is among the highest in Latin America. On the other hand, the unemployment rate in Puerto Rico has been above 20 percent, the per capita income remains considerably lower than on the United States mainland, and many Puerto Ricans are dependent upon federal food stamps and other welfare programs.

VI. PANAMA CANAL

1. American Interest: Americans long desired a canal across the Isthmus of Panama to connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. They pointed out that, by eliminating the long voyage around South America, a canal would shorten the boat trip between our east and west coasts and would lower the cost of transporting goods. The Spanish-American War pointed up the need for a

canal a) to provide greater mobility for our naval fleets, b) to protect our new colonial empire, and c) to further commerce with the Far East.

2. American Diplomatic Moves:

- a. With Great Britain: In the *Clayton-Bulwer Treaty* (1850) the United States and Great Britain agreed to share control of any canal across Central America. In 1901 Secretary of State John Hay negotiated the *Hay-Pauncefote Treaty*, by which Britain permitted the United States to go ahead without her in building and operating the canal. In return the United States pledged to let ships of all nations use the canal.
- b. With the French Canal Company: A private French company, under *Ferdinand de Lesseps*, builder of the *Suez Canal*, had attempted to construct a canal in Panama but failed. After the ratification of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, the United States agreed to pay \$40 million to the French company for its property and its franchise rights.
- c. With Columbia: In 1903 Secretary Hay negotiated a treaty with Columbia to pay that nation \$10 million and an annual rental of \$250,000 for the right to build a canal across her northern province of Panama. The treaty was rejected by the Columbian Senate, which hoped for better terms the following year when the French company's franchise would expire. Rejection of the treaty worried the French canal company, inflamed the people of Panama, and enraged President Theodore Roosevelt.
- d. Roosevelt and the Panama revolution: Roosevelt privately expressed the wish to see Panama independent of Columbia. Shortly afterwards, a revolution broke out. The United States openly aided the revolt by sending naval vessels to prevent Columbian troops from entering Panama. Later, Roosevelt boasted, "I took the Canal Zone." Roosevelt's actions earned us ill will throughout Latin America. (In 1921 the United States attempted to placate Columbia by paying her \$25 million.)

- e. Treaty With Panama: Hay now negotiated a treaty with the new republic of Panama, whose minister was the former official of the French canal company, *Philippe Bunau-Varilla*. The Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty (1903) provided for 1) American control, “in perpetuity,” of the Canal Zone, a strip of land 10 miles wide across the isthmus, 2) American intervention in Panama when necessary to preserve order, and 3) payment to Panama of \$10 million and an annual rental of \$250,000 for the Canal Zone. (The annual rental was increased up to \$2.3 million.)
- f. Building the Canal: a) George W. Goethals – an army engineer, had charge of building the canal, b) William C. Gorgas – an army medical officer, wiped out malaria and yellow fever in the Canal Zone.
- g. Protecting the Canal: The United States a) fortified the Canal Zone, b) extended our influence over the nations bordering the Caribbean, thus converting the Caribbean into an “American lake”, c) maintained American military bases throughout the Caribbean, notably in Puerto Rico and at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, and d) in 1917 purchased from Denmark an additional Caribbean military base, the *Virgin Islands*.